



"GO AND BE LIKEWISE"
SCRIPTURE DEUTERONOMY 30:9-14; LUKE 10:25-37
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
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Dr. Ali Shroukh, a Palestinian doctor, is driving with his brothers in the West Bank. They are on their way to Jerusalem for Ramadan prayers. Ali had been issued a one day permit to enter Jerusalem—a chance to pray on a high holy day, the last Friday of Ramadan.

Dr. Shroukh, 45 years old, sees a big car ahead, big enough to carry a family, flipped onto its roof.

He stops to help. He finds the carnage of a family. The Rabbi Michael Mark, father of ten children and driver of the car, is dead. His wife, Chavi, has a serious head injury and teenage daughter, Tehila, is seriously injured in her abdomen. The family was on its way to visit the Rabbi's mother.

Stopping to tend to wounded people is an act that seems natural for a trained doctor in such a situation.

Zoom out to the larger context. The doctor encounters these wounded people on a road in the West Bank where violence between Palestinians and Israelis is common. Many lives have been lost. And who is treated with medical assistance and who is not is, in and of itself, a question that breeds conflict and division.

Israelis has accused Palestinian doctors and medics of refusing to help Jews wounded by violence.

Palestinians and human rights groups have documented multiple instances in which Israeli doctors and medics left wounded Palestinians unattended with their death being the ultimate result.

Soon after Dr. Shroukh and his brother, Mahmoud, check the vehicle and begin treating the wounds of Chavi and Tehila, they realize this is not the site of a car crash, it is the site of an attack. The brothers are urged by other Palestinians to leave the area because they could be blamed for the attack. But Dr. Shroukh refuses to leave until he is sure Chavi and Tehila are being cared for by arriving medical personnel.

"It doesn't matter if somebody is a settler, a Jew or an Arab," Dr. Shroukh says. "It is my duty to help."

A Samaritan man moves along the dusty road down to Jericho. It is downward journey from 2500ft. above sea level where Jerusalem sits, to 700 ft. below sea level at Jericho.

The man and his donkey are moving along the switchbacks on this rugged road when he sees the body of a man naked, bloody, almost lifeless on the side of the road.

The man is filled with pity. He begins to rifle through his belongings to see what he has to dress wounds and help this poor soul. He pours oil and wine on the wounds, uses some cloth he has to dress the wounds, and speaks gently to the man even as he seems barely conscious of what is happening.

The man lifts the dead weight of this wounded one onto the back of his donkey. And they continue on the road to Jericho where he finds a place for this man to recover. The Samaritan man finds an Inn and cares for him more and leaves him to rest for the night. He returns the next day to provide the funds for the innkeeper to continue to care for him. "If you spend more than what I have given you, I will cover the cost. Don't worry," he says to the innkeeper.

Zoom out from the situation and know that tensions were high among Samaritans and Jews. They disagreed on all the things that mattered to them the most: Holy places, Holy Scripture, ethnic and religious identity. And before this Samaritan stopped to help, two Jewish leaders walk by and make a different decision.

They may be dutiful, too, and that may be what leads them to keep walking. Purity laws restrict contact with other bodies; especially bloody bodies or dead bodies. Interactions with people were regulated and litigated. How to be righteous, morally upright, and how to be good: these things are codified and imprinted in how they comport themselves.

And there are real safety concerns along this road where roadside robbery is common. And such bodies in distress can be a way to lure travelers into a place where they can be ambushed.

These men may be callous or they may be dutiful. They may safety conscious or they may be selfish. We don't know. What we do know is that the one who was often the recipient of their judgment and disgust, is the one who stops and extends compassion. He is the one with the courage to stop in a place that is dangerous and unpredictable.

Moses says farewell to the people of Israel—still in exile, still grieving a ruined land, a land no longer under their control, a land ravaged by violence, greed, and domination. Israel has no home, has no direction. Israel has serious doubts about God's power to stand up to the challenges they were facing.

Choose life! Moses says, because you can. Choose life! Because that is what God made you to do.

For Moses, this is not about protecting a religious enterprise; he reminds them of their created nature, their full humanity. To be fully human you must let faith form and feed your instincts.

It is God who transforms Israel from a people teetering on despair, hopelessness, and resignation to a people of hope, to a people who choose life, and faith—with a circumcision of the heart.

God's commandments are not high in the heavens, not far across the sea; they are very near. They are in your hearts, in your mouth, Moses tells them.

You are never in exile from the love and guidance God has written on your hearts. A wilderness crossroads with ruin and destruction behind them, with confusion and unknowns ahead of them... Moses reminds them what they are made of—the capacity to have faith, the capacity to be fully human.

Our full humanity needs faith to feed its fullness. Our full humanity requires something we can trust.

Thirty-two year old Philando Castille, his Diamond Reynolds, and her four year old daughter head home after a full days work. When Philando sees police lights in his rear view mirror he quietly remembers the lessons he's learned about what to do when you get pulled over. He remembers his training as a licensed gun owner to immediately inform the officer that he has a licensed firearm in the car.

A traffic stop for a broken taillight deteriorates within minutes to a murder, another death of a young black body at the hands of law enforcement. The governor of Minnesota names the demon—if the family in the car had been white, this shooting most likely would not have occurred.

A peaceful protest in Dallas, TX on Thursday night—a protest that brings people of all walks of life together, a protest that includes people taking selfies with police officers who are there working at the march, a protest in a city where police have been working to improve relations, ends when multiple snipers kill five officers. Multiple others are wounded, including at least one civilian woman.

Where? What is our full humanity in such annihilating realities?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are at a cross roads as a nation and as a faith. The road behind us is washed out—we cannot go back, we cannot un-see what we have seen, we cannot deny the blood on our hands, we cannot deny the moral ambivalence around the very category of full humanity that rests at the foundation of our most hallowed institutions—our justice system, our education system, our government, our economic system, and yes, even the church.

The Samaritan's story confronts us with a question: who is my neighbor? Jesus answers the question by exploding stereotypes and with an invitation to let compassion be our guide. This story easily provokes us to examine our lives, our priorities, and our gut reactions when we are faced with someone in need.

Do we walk on by? Do we muster up the courage to engage? Do we risk ourselves? Do we hold the pain of the world at arms length?

These are the questions we often struggle to ask ourselves.

But today, in this dangerous world, in this world of violence that just won't stop, I believe we are forced to confront even deeper fears that lurk within us, an even deeper disease of our collective soul.

Duty can be construed in many ways—from the priest who dutifully walked by a dying man to obey purity laws, to the young man who dutifully informed the officer of his licensed weapon, to an officer who drew his gun in the line of duty at a routine traffic stop, duty not does answer the moral problem of racism and abuse of power, the moral problem of our full humanity.

In fact, duty is an attempt to tidy up the ambiguity of our human situation. And while our human minds like simple, clear, non-negotiable answers to life's most complicated questions, ambiguity abides—and calls us to a deeper place from which to define our morality, our responsibility, indeed our humanity.

Far deeper than our learned reflexes of duty is our blood chilling vulnerability.

Our vulnerability: mine, yours, ours.

We are susceptible to harm.

We are not safe.

And while the normative culture of mainline Christianity has taught us the language of helping the “least of these,” white culture, white patriarchal culture has told us lies: that we can somehow secure our safety, our well being on the backs of others and make ourselves less vulnerable than everyone else.

As white dominant institutions, Mainline churches have not often considered our own profound vulnerability.

What if we are not the Good Samaritan? What if we are naked, barely conscious, and beaten within an inch of our lives on the side of the road?

What if the people who we’ve looked to as leaders our whole lives, the ones we have trusted with power, are the ones who keep walking when we need their help the most?

What if the one who we have despised and disparaged is the one who understands, who cares enough to dress our wounds?

What if being Jesus followers is less about being the one with the power to help and more about telling the truth of just how vulnerable we really are?

This is not duty.

This is not pity.

This is our humanity.

White culture has distorted our shared humanity and our full humanity because it formed us with an expectation of safety and self-protection.

White culture has tried to tell us we can erase our vulnerability, our grief, our fragility, our uniqueness, our idiosyncrasy—and from this attempted erasure we have learned repetitive, dehumanizing habits.

We are habituated to ask “How can we help?”

But rarely do we ask, “How can we change? How can we be the change?”

White supremacy is a powerful demon that must be exorcised. This does not mean all white people are bad, this means the culture spawned by white supremacy is a disease that afflicts us all—it permeates our instincts, our muscle twitches, our gut reactions, our intimacy, our self-understanding.

Jesus, help us, help us not be afraid to tell you the truth of our affliction. We are naked, we are afraid.

Black and brown bodies, trans and LGBTQ bodies, female bodies, differently-abled bodies tell us the truth about our full humanity. We are vulnerable. And we, every single one of us, are in desperate need of tenderness, gentleness, and love that we can trust.

The church must start from our own vulnerability, brothers and sisters. Do we trust God enough to risk being incompetent, to risk being uncomfortable, to risk being honest with each other?

Duty will only get us so far, and the world today needs so much more than duty. Jesus tells the lawyer who questions him to go and do as the Samaritan did—to let his neighbor be everyone, even the one who scared him, disgusted him, angered him, and made him see the limitations of his own perspective. Go and do likewise, Jesus says.

And today, in our doing of church we must learn how to **be** that radical love, not just do it. The risks are real, brothers and sisters. The world, our country is crying out—it's never needed the radical love that Jesus embodies more.

This a crossroads time, on a dangerous road, where many have been harmed and even died trying to find their way. We have a guide who is yearning to show us the way—he endured much pain and discomfort to show us, to love us. He sees who we can be and how we can be, and he loves us fiercely enough to get us there.

Jesus is not dutiful. He is incarnational, he is present, he is merciful. And he promises us that we can trust Him even in this dangerous and unpredictable world. Bold vulnerability is what Jesus brings in his very flesh and bones. Brothers and sisters, go and **be** likewise.

Thanks be to God.